

STATE OF ALASKA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF FORESTRY
NORTHERN REGION

FAIRBANKS AREA

FOREST LAND USE PLAN
FOR A PROPOSED TIMBER SALE
FINAL REPORT AND BEST INTEREST FINDING

Nenana Spruce #2
NC-1344-F

ADL 417831

May 2012

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

The purpose of this Forest Land Use Plan (FLUP) is to provide sufficient information for reviewers to ensure that the best interest of the State will be served by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Forestry, Fairbanks Area, offering this proposed timber sale. This FLUP deals with site specific considerations of the sale. The boundaries and precise volume of the sale may be refined if and when the sale is developed. Site specific research has been completed on title considerations, land classifications, applicable land management plans, appropriate silvicultural techniques, regulatory and statutory requirements, and physical conditions that apply to the proposed sale area. The proposal is for the harvest of approximately (+/- 30%) 127 acres of land that is predicted to yield approximately (+/- 30%) 3839 CCF of spruce saw timber. The sale design may be altered to mitigate potential conflicts. It will be the responsibility of the Forester-In-Charge to ensure that any purchaser of this sale harvests timber per the sale design and sale contract provisions and adheres to Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (AFRPA) best management practices.

The public is invited to comment on any aspect of this proposed timber sale with regards to the Preliminary Finding and Decision (AS 38.05.035). Comments should be mailed to the Division of Forestry, 3700 Airport Way, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709 or by email at brian.young@alaska.gov. Comments must be received at the Division of Forestry no later than April 27, 2012 in order to be considered in the Final Decision of whether the sale will be held in whole or in part. To be eligible to appeal the final decision, a person must have provided written comment by April 27, 2012.

B. Five-Year Sale Schedule

The general area and timber type that this proposed sale occupies has been shown as a potential sale area in the current Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales (FYSTS) for Fiscal Years 2012-2016 as required by AS 38.05.113. It has been listed in previous schedules.

C. Location

The proposed sale is located 4 miles southwest of Nenana and is located in Sections 3, 4, 9, and 10 of Township 5 South, Range 8 West of the Fairbanks Meridian. The sale area is shown on the attached map and is within the United States Geological Survey 1:63,360 Quadrangle map titled Fairbanks C-5. The tract can be accessed from Nenana via 10th Street and then on the established ice crossing of the Nenana River at the boat launch site. The proposed route follows existing winter roads until it reaches a Native allotment harvest unit along the Teklanika River. From this point an ice bridge crossing the Teklanika River and an unnamed creek will be required for access. The total length of new winter road construction will be approximately 0.25 miles.

D. Title, Classification and Other Active or Pending Interests

The acquisition for the land upon which the sale is proposed is based on General Selection 20. The land estate is Tentatively Approved; thus the State has

management authority. The primary land classifications for the area are Forestry and Wildlife Habitat per Classification Order NC-90-002. The proposed sale area is within Unit 4J4 of the Tanana Basin Area Plan (TBAP). There are no other special conditions noted in the plan for this area. A Native allotment is located adjacent to the proposed road and a second allotment is located south of the Teklanika River 0.5 miles south of the proposed winter road.

E. General Timber Sale Program Objectives

1. Develop the State's Renewable Resources

To follow the DNR's constitutional mandate to encourage the development of the State's renewable resources, making them available for maximum use consistent with the public interest. Sustain and promote a healthy, long-term timber industry in the State, through providing a secure source of timber for harvest that produces raw materials for local manufacturing plants when practical while protecting other resources such as fish and wildlife.

2. Improve the State's Economy

To help the State's economy by providing royalties to the State in the form of stumpage receipts, as well as contributions to local economies through wages, purchases, jobs, and business.

3. Improve Forest Health

To improve forest growth and vigor by harvesting mature and or declining stands and replace them with new healthy regenerating stands. The stand replacement will be accomplished while protecting and maintaining other resource values. The actions authorized under this decision will follow the constitutional mandate of sustained yield and shall adhere to multiple use management as described in the Tanana Basin Area Plan.

4. Improve Wildlife Habitat

Meet the wildlife management goals for the Tanana Basin Area Plan that provide for the economic development of other natural resources while protecting habitat needs of wildlife resources necessary to maintain or enhance public use and economic benefits.

II. LEGAL AUTHORITY

The Division of Forestry is taking this action under the authority of AS 38.05.035 (e) (Best Interest Finding); AS 38.05.110-120 (Alaska Land Act Statutes); 11 AAC 71 (Timber Sale Statutes and Regulations); AS 41.17.010-.950 and 11 AAC 95 (Forest Resources and Practices Statutes and Regulations).

III. ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD

The case file ADL 417831 and the Tanana Basin Area Plan constitute the administrative record for this finding.

IV. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES

A. Physical Characteristic of the Sale Area

1. Topography

The site is on a level ground within the flood plains of the Teklanika and Nenana Rivers. The elevation is approximately 350 feet. There are numerous terrace features, potholes, and abandoned slough channels throughout the area.

2. Soils

Soils in the sale area are classified as Salchaket and Tanana Series. Salchaket soils are productive bottomland alluvial soils consisting of nearly level, stratified silty and sandy material over a substratum of water-deposited gravel and sand. The depth to substratum ranges from less than a foot, to over six feet. These soils are well drained and originated from water-deposited material along the Nenana and Teklanika Rivers. Tanana soils consist of nearly level, somewhat poorly drained that form in silty and sandy sediments on flood plains. These soils are perennially frozen at a depth of 30 inches or more, though this depth varies greatly depending upon the thickness of the organic mat on the surface (i.e. moss layer) and the frequency of flooding. These soils typically occur in various depressions across the floodplain and, depending on the amount of permafrost, can support commercial tree species. They are more prevalent at a greater distance from the active water courses and occur in the northwest portion of this sale.

3. Waterbodies

There are no defined drainages within the proposed unit boundaries. The closest waterbodies are the Nenana River (Type III-B) and a shallow tributary that flows into a slough of the Nenana River. This tributary (Type III-A) appears to be spring fed. A “no cut” buffer averaging 100 feet or greater would be designed into the unit along the Nenana River, tributary and slough. The timber sale is anticipated to have minimal impact on water quality due to the location of the proposed unit in relationship to surface waterbodies. The State Department of Environmental Conservation had no comment on this sale. The sale area presents no obstacles that would prevent implementation of the best management practices of the AFRPA in order to maintain water quality.

4. Stand Conditions

This sale is composed of a mixed species river bottom stand containing both white spruce and birch along with widely scattered balsam poplar. The stand becomes more defective with increasing moss depth and permafrost incursions. In this site, there is an accumulation of slash from windthrow and broken tops due to wind and snow loading. The birch component occupies less than 20% of the site and is mostly classified as over mature although, there are some natural openings with more vigorous younger age class birch present. The understory vegetation is thick and includes alder, willow, high bush cranberry and rose. There is an estimated 10% defect in the white spruce in the form of broken tops, sweep, and butt rot. The white spruce component of the stand ≥ 9 ” diameter breast height (dbh) is fairly evenly aged at 120 years with an abundance of about 131 trees/acre, an average dbh of 12.5 inches, and an average height of 86 feet. The basal area per acre is approximately 114 square feet/acre. Budworm is light to moderate in this stand. Spruce that are less

than 9 inches in diameter, which includes advanced regeneration, are present on the stand at an abundance of roughly 20 trees per acre.

B. Historic and Current Land Use

The historic uses of the land in the general area have been logging, hunting, trapping, and general trail use. The current uses of the area are recreation, wood cutting, hunting and trapping.

C. Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife typical of the interior can be found in this area and during ground reconnaissance moose, fox and beaver sign were observed. There are no known raptor nests within the proposed sale area. Should an eagle nest tree be discovered in the sale area, the nest tree will be marked on the ground and a 330 foot no-harvest radius will be established in order to protect the tree. The Tanana Basin Area Plan identifies the area as important to moose and furbearers.

Treatments proposed for this stand are projected to enhance habitat conditions for ruffed grouse, moose, voles, hares, and ultimately, lynx, marten and fox. In the past, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation (ADFG) and now the DNR Office of Habitat Management and Permitting (OHMP) have recommended managing for as much diversity as possible when prescribing harvest unit size, shape and position to mimic the results of wildfire or other stand replacement phases such as insect outbreaks or flood events. To accomplish these objectives, snags will be retained to provide late-successional wildlife habitat for hole nesting birds, woodpeckers, small mammals, and other species requiring perching habitat. The units will be laid out with uneven edges along and between timber types. This layout design will create varied edge effects which are beneficial to many wildlife species.

D. Fisheries and Water Quality

Best management practices will be implemented to ensure water quality standards in all water courses. OHMP and ADFG have commented in the past that the multiple channels of the Seventeen Mile Slough/Nenana River system are extensively used by Chinook, chum and coho salmon and include some coho spawning areas. Closely related to the salmon presence is the fact that this area also provides critical habitat for black bear fall feeding on spawned out salmon carcasses along the banks and gravel bars. The presence of riparian buffers along the flowing waterbodies should minimize adverse effects to fisheries. Game trails along the watercourses are contained within the riparian buffers and will not be disturbed. While fish populations are always a consideration, there is no reasonable expectation that operations on this level will have deleterious effects on fish habitat in the Nenana River or its tributaries or downstream in the Tanana River.

E. Subsistence

The tract has not been designated as a subsistence zone. Downstream from this sale, the Tanana River is managed for the subsistence catch of salmon. The proposed sale of timber is anticipated to have no deleterious effects on subsistence activities. Subsistence activities of fishing, trapping, hunting and gathering of berries and other non timber forest products may occur on State owned lands.

F. Recreation and Tourism

Recreation use of this particular area has been fairly limited. Primarily it consists of hunting and trapping activity, but on the particular site it has been limited due to access limitations. Recreational use of the Nenana River itself occurs in the summer through boat use and occasional river rafting and canoeing float trips.

G. Scenic Resources

Due to its position on the west side of the Nenana River, and the use of riparian buffers, this sale will not be visible from either the Nenana River or the Parks Highway. Leave trees of smaller diameter white spruce and birch will somewhat obscure the harvest area and help to blend the cut border with the existing landscape.

H. Cultural Resources

The TVSF Management Plan does not list any historic cultural or archaeological sites in the vicinity of the proposed harvest. The State Office of History and Archaeology (OHA) do not list any sites on its inventory. During the course of activities associated with this timber sale, cultural and/or paleontological resources may be inadvertently discovered. Should such discovery occur, these sites shall be protected from further disturbance and OHA will be contacted immediately so that compliance with state laws governing cultural resources may begin.

About a mile and a half to the northeast is one of Nenana's cemetery sites. Under the Alaska Historic Preservation Act (AS 41.35), all burials on state land are protected. If burials or human remains are found, all land altering activities that would disturb the burial or remains shall cease and measures taken to protect it in place. OHA and a law enforcement officer will be notified immediately to ensure that proper procedures for dealing with human remains are followed.

I. Sustained Yield and Allowable Cut

The Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (AS 41.17.060 (c)) and Article VIII Sec. 4 of the State Constitution require that the State forest land be managed on a sustained yield basis. Sustained yield is defined in the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (AS 41.17.950(25)):

“Sustained Yield” means the achievement and maintenance in perpetuity of a high level annual or regular periodic output of the various renewable resources of forest land and water without significant impairment of the productivity of the land and water, but does not require that timber be harvested in a non-declining yield basis over a rotation period.

The Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) is the amount that can be harvested from forest land managed for forestry purposes in a year under sustained yield management. The AAC in the Fairbanks Area is based on a ten-year average as determined by the Parsons and Associates, Inc. report titled “Tanana State Forestry Lands Periodic Sustained Yield Analysis”. This sale complies with sustained yield/allowable cut principles outlined in the Fairbanks Area Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales for FY 2012-2016. The AAC for the Fairbanks Management Area is approximately 6,260 acres. The AAC will not be exceeded for this proposed sale.

J. Silvicultural Prescription

1. Stand Silvics

The merchantable tree species here is white spruce. Data and research on regeneration and growth characteristics of these species are compiled within the Resource Analysis of the Tanana Valley State Forest (TVSF) Management Plan. The harvest and reforestations systems available in Interior Alaska are also reviewed and listed in the Resource Analysis. The results of the public and agency discussions for harvest and reforestation are discussed in the TVSF Management Plan. Silvicultural harvest systems that facilitate even-aged (natural) management are generally preferred. They mimic the ecological impact of wildfire and other disturbances and result in the greatest increase in site productivity. Even-aged management is normally accomplished through clear-cuts, patch cuts, and heavy partial cuts (such as seed tree or shelterwood systems) which open up the site to maximum solar gain. This management system results in the greatest production of both young hardwood, that is important to wildlife, and the spruce understory which is valuable years later as timber. Even-aged management techniques are utilized to provide young, vigorously growing stands in juxtaposition to older, undisturbed stands. Such placement of harvest units can optimize natural seeding and the edge effect.

2. Specific Management Objectives

Attain a more natural diversity of forest age classes in the general area. Protect and where possible, enhance important wildlife and fish habitat. Utilize the current commercial value of this timber stand before spruce defect increases and inflicts further damage. Maintain or enhance the current level of recreational use of the area. Protect residual young trees from logging damage which will allow them to release once the overstory is removed. Allow snags (wildlife trees) to be left on site. Maintain the birch component and stimulate willow growth in the openings. Return the site to a productive, naturally even-aged, diverse mixed species stand at an equal or greater basal area than which currently exists. It is reasonable to assume that these objectives will be realized under the recommended prescription although some supplemental planting may be required. The remaining birch component will provide cover and produce seed until the current budworm infestation subsides and adjacent and residual spruce once again provide seed. White spruce currently occupies 80% and birch 20% of the stand. It is expected with the proposed treatments the birch component will increase to about 40% on this site. It is reasonable to assume that these objectives will be realized under the recommended prescription with some supplemental planting of white spruce if necessary.

3. Harvest Methods

The sale will be harvested using the seed tree silvicultural system. White spruce trees of 9" dbh and larger will be removed. Snags, residual white spruce, and birch will not be cut. Residual trees will be protected from damage during harvest operations although over mature birch may be used as bumper trees to protect patches of advanced spruce regeneration. Harvesting will be by the whole tree yarding system. Slash disposal at the landings will be by burning and or salvage for fuel wood use.

4. Regeneration

Opening the site will cause a large vegetative release especially in the more productive sites closer to the watercourses. Residual and adjacent birch and spruce will provide a seed source. Under this harvesting system, natural regeneration of spruce and hardwoods should be increased due to increased light and soil temperature. Further inland where moss depths are thicker, hand planting of white spruce may be required. A regeneration survey will be conducted three years after any harvest. If the survey indicates inadequately stocked areas greater than 0.5 acres or totaling 6 acres then hand planting of white spruce seedlings will be performed on non-stocked areas. The goal for regeneration is to achieve a minimum of 450 stems per acre of mixed species.

K. Transportation

The planned access to the proposed sale is by winter road extending from an existing winter road north of the Teklanika River. This existing road will not require reconstruction other than snow plowing. An ice bridge will be required to cross the Teklanika River and an unnamed river, a Fish Habitat River crossing permit will be required. The winter road will require approximately 0.25 miles of right of way timber felling from the end of a previous sale just to the north of NC-1344-F. The length of new winter road construction is 0.25 miles. Access routes will be maintained to the standards set out in the AFRPA.

L. Erosion

There are two soil erosion concerns: surface erosion and mass wasting of soil and debris. Road construction and poor maintenance of roads primarily causes surface erosion. To avoid erosion, debris will be placed back onto skid trails and water bars installed if necessary. Harvesting will be suspended during periods of thawing soil conditions to assure there is minimal soil disturbance. The location of skid trails will optimize skidding distances and provide for adequate landing areas. The other aspect of erosion (mass wasting and debris avalanches) normally occurs on slopes of more than 70 percent therefore is not a particular concern because the proposed timber sale is on mostly flat ground.

M. Mining

This sub-unit of the TBAP has low mineral potential. There are no valid existing mining claims within the sale area. More detailed information on subsurface resource use is found in the TBAP. Other than providing access, and sharing some of the same access roads, this sale will have no impact on the potential mining resources or mining activity in this area. Four miles to the northwest, considerable seismic survey work has been done in search of natural gas, but no development has occurred.

N. Materials

No rock materials will be required for the construction of access roads.

O. Economics

In addition to generating royalties to the State's general fund, the proposed sale will create economic benefits to the Fairbanks North Star Borough and to other locations in Alaska, including Nenana. The business community will receive direct economic benefits from providing support services for the operators through sales of fuel, food,

housing, medical and miscellaneous supplies. The sale is expected to benefit the local economy by providing jobs. It will have a positive impact on local employment by generating significant man-hours of work associated with the harvest and transportation of wood products from this sale. Additionally the public may benefit from access to additional personal use fuel wood areas.

V. MARKET CONDITIONS

Interior Alaska has a growing demand for biomass and firewood and a sustainable market for saw timber. Heating oil continues to be more costly in the interior than the national average therefore residents are looking for an alternative and the only affordable one is wood. Local businesses are currently producing wood pellets as an alternative to traditional firewood. This market addresses an ongoing air quality issue in the Fairbanks area because these manufactured pellets produce almost no emissions. As this market continues to grow, the demand for material will increase. Other businesses are also looking into the use of biomass as a feedstock for producing electricity and heating alternatives in rural Alaska.

With improvements in wood stove technology for reducing emissions, firewood is also a viable alternative to high cost heating oil. The demand for firewood has steadily increased in the past few years and will likely continue to increase. Local suppliers of firewood continue to have a demand for accessible timber sales to deliver their product.

Residential construction and commercial operations throughout Alaska still need sawn products to support their operations. Local businesses that produce these products continue to pay for the delivered material.

These three markets create jobs in the forest products industry. Loggers, log truck drivers, commercial firewood cutters and mill workers all benefit from a sustainable timber market. This sale will provide the material needed to sustain these industries. As the economy continues to rebound there will be more demand for the products that this sector of the labor force provides.

VI. ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS

There are four possible alternatives to consider for this sale. A discussion of each of the four alternatives follows:

1. To continue the sale(s) as proposed.

This alternative meets the objectives of the Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales and DNR'S constitutional mandate. It also meets the silvicultural objective of improving forest vigor, provides for a value-added end product and creates additional jobs in Alaska due to the combination of road building, logging, and trucking. This alternative also complies with the management objectives of the Tanana Basin Area Plan for Unit 4J4.

2. To modify the sale(s) by making them smaller or larger.

The proposed sale unit is a logical setting for typical commercial logging equipment in Interior Alaska. The size of the sale is designed to be large enough to be economically viable considering access development and mobilization costs and

distance to processing facilities. Sales of this size are appropriately balanced to maintain other resource values as well as provide economic benefits to the Tanana Valley.

3. **Defer the sale of this timber to a later date.**

Deferring harvest to a later date would fail to meet many of the objectives of the sale program. One of the main objectives is to make State-owned timber consistently available to the timber industry.

4. **Do not offer this timber for sale.**

This alternative would result in not meeting any of the objectives outlined for this management action. Utilization of the forest resource would not be achieved. There would be no significant contribution to the State and local economies. This alternative would delay the management objectives planned for the area, deny making a source of raw materials available to the local wood products industry, and would delay the harvest of mature trees, prior to the onset of disease or insect infestation. Decay in infected mature spruce trees results in the loss of economic value.

VII. FINAL FINDING AND DECISION

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES DIVISION OF FORESTRY BEST INTEREST FINDING NC-1344, “Nenana Spruce #2”

I. **Formal review and response to objections, comments, or alternatives (summarized):**

The Agency and Public review of the Forest Land Use Plan (FLUP) started on March 23, 2012 and ended on April 27, 2012. Advertisement was published in the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner on March 25, 2012 and April 1, 2012. The FLUP review advertisement was posted on the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry web site on March 25, 2012. In addition, 38 requests for comments were either e-mailed or sent to various agencies, organizations and members of the public. One individual public comment was received, requesting clarification of riparian buffers and logging standards for this particular proposed sale.

The Division of Agriculture and the Office of History and Archaeology had no comment. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation had no particular concerns or comments to offer for the protection of water quality, particularly since the unit contains no perennial surface waters and the appropriate buffers will be retained along adjacent anadromous and resident fish habitat. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) commented that the multiple channels of the Seventeenmile Slough/Nenana River system are extensively used by Chinook, Chum and Coho salmon and include some Coho spawning areas (Stream no.334-40-11000-2490-3200). ADF&G noted that the area provides critical black bear fall feeding habitat, where the bears utilize the spawned out salmon carcasses along the banks and gravel bars. They stated a Fish Habitat (Title 41) Permit would be required for winter ice crossing of the Nenana, Little Nenana, Teklanika,

and an unnamed creek just north of the sale units for access. Changes to the final FLUP reflect these comments. The single public comment on this sale had concerns about upwelling's which are used by the various salmon species and the riparian buffers. Riparian buffer surrounding any anadromous water body will follow Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (AFRPA) guidelines and are a minimum of 100 feet in width. The Forester-In-Charge ensures that any purchaser of this sale harvests timber per the sale design and sale contract provisions and adheres to AFRPA best management practices. The sale has been laid out to be screened from the view from the main channel of the Nenana River and adjacent sloughs and streams.

II. Final Finding and Decision:

The purpose of this decision is to determine if the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, shall make available 126.66 acres of spruce sawtimber located in Sections 3, 4, 9, and 10 of Township 5 South Range 8 West, Fairbanks Meridian, Alaska.

1. The sale meets the objectives of the Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales and DNR'S constitutional mandate.
2. The sale meets the silvicultural objective of improving forest vigor, provides for a value-added end product and creates additional jobs in Alaska due to the combination of road building, logging, and trucking.
3. The sale complies with the management objectives of the Tanana Basin Area Plan (TBAP) Unit 4J4, which allows for commercial and personal use timber production while protecting important wildlife habitat values.
4. Sale layout and design adhere with Region-III Riparian Standards. This sale is consistent with all statutes and plans.
5. The sale has undergone agency and public review and concerns have been resolved in the preparation, documentation and design of the sale.

The finding presented above has been reviewed and considered. The case file has been found to be complete. The requirements of all applicable statutes have been satisfied. Therefore, it is the finding of the Director that **it is in the best interest of the state** to approve this action under the authority of AS 38.05.035(e) and AS 38.05.110-120.

A person affected by this decision who provided timely written comment may appeal it, in accordance with 11 AAC 71.002. Any appeal must be received by June 13, 2012, and may be mailed or delivered to Dan Sullivan, Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources, 550 W. 7th Avenue, Suite 1400, Anchorage, Alaska 99501; faxed to 1-907-269-8918, or sent by electronic mail to dnr.appeals@alaska.gov. If no appeal is filed by that date, this decision goes into effect as a final order and decision on June 14, 2012. An eligible person must first appeal this decision in accordance with 11 AAC 71.002 before appealing this decision to Superior Court. A copy of 11 AAC 71.002 may be obtained from any regional information office of the Department of Natural Resources. It is the Division of Forestry's intent to offer this timber sale by auction on or after June 14, 2012. If no qualified bid is received within the time specified during the auction, the Division of Forestry may offer the sale for purchase over-the-counter without re-advertisement for not less than the advertised minimum bid.

Prepared and Recommended by: Brian Young, Resource Management Forester

Concur (X)

Do Not Concur ()

Kathryn Pyne
Fairbanks Area Forester

5/2/12
(Date)